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SIPDIS

STATE NEA/PI, G/TIP, DRL/NESCA AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2019

TAGS: PHUM ELAB EAID PGOV KWMN MO

SUBJECT: MOROCCO: ENHANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND MOBILIZING AGAINST TRAFFICKING AND CHILD LABOR

Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Following up on the March 21 launch of the Middle East Partnership Initiative- (MEPI-) financed training for women candidates in the June municipal elections, Minister of Social Development, the Family and Solidarity Nouzha Skalli reminded Charge and PolOff that although 12 percent of seats have been reserved for women (compared to the current .5 percent), women could still win fewer than that number. She noted that her Ministry has been active in providing training materials for women candidates in order to promote the best possible showing, and thanked the Charge for U.S. support of the joint project between the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute to encourage and train women candidates in the run-up to the polls. Asked about plans to ensure that women also win a larger percentage of local council presidencies and seats in the Chamber of Counselors (the upper house of the Moroccan Parliament), Skalli said that women need to focus on the local elections and then think about both next steps in politics and in becoming effective municipal leaders.

¶2. (C) During the one-hour March 26 courtesy call, Skalli declared that combating human trafficking, child labor, and violence against women are major priorities for Morocco. She said her Ministry and the High Commission for Planning had already begun a study on violence against women in order to gain a better understanding of the scope of the problem, and this data would be used to reform the penal code. She agreed that prostitution is usually forced and that greater protections for victims are needed.

¶3. (C) Skalli also told the Charge about a new campaign aimed at addressing the problem of "petite bonnes" or young girls working as domestic servants. Emphasizing that the Government "is strongly mobilized to eradicate this problem," she said that Morocco is moving toward a "zero tolerance" policy on child labor. Despite the commitment of the State, Skalli predicted that eliminating the practice would take time as the use of child servants has become culturally accepted. "Still, we want to elevate the human rights standard of the country," she said.

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